

12 June 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Some Further Thoughts on "Worst Case" Analysis and its Impact Upon Intelligence Analysis.

1. In his memorandum of transmittal of the Study of NSSM-69 Intelligence Inputs, Mr. A. W. Marshall makes a number of cogent remarks on the inadequacies of "Worst Case" analysis and its inappropriate nature in U.S. force planning studies. He notes that if the systems analyst in charge of the force planning study insists upon Worst Case analysis, the intelligence analyst can do very little.

2. Perhaps this is true, but I have my doubts. Of main concern I suggest is the impact of "Worst Case" analysis upon intelligence's foreign forces analysis. What is "the worst case?"

3. In analysis of foreign military forces the "Worst Case" develops primarily from uncertainties which exist in the "hard" data. Historically, it has more often than not been pushed by the one U.S. Military Service or another.¹ Thus, institutional interests and pressures often tend to favor "Worst Case" analysis.

4. Finally, certain analytical modes and concepts all tend to lead to a "Worst Case" conclusion. For example, the "A Fortiori" technique of building a dominant case provides conclusions (if properly carried out) which exclude lessor (or inferior) cases. In the conceptual area, action-reaction models, technological response models (particularly mirror imaging), and "military requirements" models all tend to produce "Worst Case" results.²

1. This is not to imply base motivations, although few would deny that Service force planning policies are assisted by increasing threats. The OSD itself has used this technique in both R&D and force planning studies and last but not least, it seems to have infected the NSC staff in the current administration.

2. See the Politics of Power: Soviet Decision Making for Defense by [redacted] IDA, October 1971

5. Perhaps the worst nature of these pressures (be they institutional, analytical or conceptual) is that they tend to reduce the demand for disciplined analysis and thorough research. By introducing an a priori rationality, they deny the existence of any other. It is the most insidious form of parochialism and anti-intellectualism available to the intelligence research analyst.

6. Unfortunately, "Worst Case" analysis has tended to dominate Defense analysis for the past ten years and I suggest that its evils have even permeated CIA's analysis effort. In the face of growing analytical demands, there is a tendency to take the easy way out. "Worst Case" analysis is the easy way out because it requires a minimum of research and very little analysis.

7. It seems to me that the lack of in-depth analysis on the problem of possible PRC strategic missile deployment may be one example of this. Or perhaps, intelligence too now has a vested interest in "ten foot tall" threats because its fiscal outlays are being questioned seriously for the first time since World War II. In CIA objective analysis has been our primary selling point. However, objective analysis is the result of constant vigilance, self-criticism, and an environment for research and analysis which does more than encourage quantitative output at the expense of quality and the research development programs investment necessary to maintain it.

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